

The President's Radio Address October 22, 2005

Good morning. This week I signed into law a bill that supports our ongoing efforts to defend our homeland.

To defend this country, we have to enforce our borders. When our borders are not secure, terrorists, drug dealers, and criminals find it easier to sneak into America. My administration has a clear strategy for dealing with this problem: We want to stop people from crossing into America illegally and to quickly return the illegal immigrants we catch back to their home countries.

For the past 4 years, we've been implementing this strategy. To stop illegal immigrants from coming across our borders, we've added manpower, upgraded our technology, and taken the final steps necessary to complete a 14-mile barrier running along the San Diego border with Mexico.

To enforce our immigration laws within our borders, we've hired more immigration agents, gone after criminal gangs, and targeted smugglers and *coyotes* who traffic in human beings. We are getting results: Since 2001, we have removed more than 4.8 million illegal immigrants from the United States, including more than 300,000 with criminal records.

Our border patrol and immigration agents are doing a fine job, but we still have a problem. Too many illegal immigrants are coming in, and we're capturing many more non-Mexican illegal immigrants than we can send home. And one of the biggest reasons we cannot send them back is that we lack space in our detention facilities to hold them until they are removed. When there's no bed available, non-Mexicans who are caught entering our country illegally are given a slip that tells them to come back for a court appearance. Most never show up, and then they disappear back into the shadows of our communities.

This is called "catch-and-release," and it is unacceptable.

The bill I signed includes \$7.5 billion that will help us address the problem of illegal immigration in two important ways. First, it provides more than \$2.3 billion for the Border Patrol so we can keep more illegal immigrants from getting into the country in the first place. These funds will help us hire a thousand new border patrol agents, improve our technology and intelligence, expand and improve Border Patrol stations, and install and improve fencing, lighting, vehicle barriers, and roads along our border areas. I appreciate the help Congress has given us for our common goal of creating more secure borders.

Second, this bill also provides \$3.7 billion for Immigration and Customs Enforcement so we can find and return the illegal immigrants who are entering our country. With these funds, we can expand the holding capacity of our detention facilities by 10 percent. This will allow us to hold more non-Mexican illegal immigrants while we process them through a program we call "expedited removal." This will make the process faster and more efficient. Putting more non-Mexican illegal immigrants through expedited removal is crucial to sending back people who have come here illegally. As Secretary Chertoff told the Senate this week, our goal is to return every single illegal entrant, with no exceptions. And this bill puts us on the path to do that.

For Mexicans who cross into America illegally, we have a different plan but the same goal. Now, most of the 900,000 illegal immigrants from Mexico who are caught each year are immediately escorted back across the border. The problem is that these illegal immigrants are able to connect with another smuggler or "coyote" and come right back in. So one part of the

solution is a program called “interior repatriation” where we fly or bus these illegal immigrants all the way back to their hometowns in the interior of Mexico. By returning illegal Mexican immigrants to their homes, far away from desert crossings, we’re saving lives and making it more difficult for them to turn right around and cross back into America.

As we improve and expand our efforts to secure our borders, we must also recognize that enforcement cannot work unless it’s part of a comprehensive immigration reform that includes a temporary-worker program. If an employer has a job that no American is willing to take, we need to find a way to fill that demand by matching willing employers with willing workers from foreign countries on a temporary and legal basis. I’ll work with Members of Congress to create a program that will provide for our economy’s labor needs without harming American workers and without granting amnesty, and that will relieve pressure on our borders.

A critical part of any temporary-worker program is ensuring that our immigration laws are enforced at work sites. America is a country of laws. We must not allow dishonest employers to flout those laws. So we’ve doubled the resources for work site enforcement since 2004.

We have much more work ahead of us. But the Homeland Security bill I signed this week provides vital support for our efforts to deal with the problem of illegal immigration and make all Americans safer and more secure.

Thank you for listening.

NOTE: The address was recorded at 12:20 p.m. on October 21 in Los Angeles, CA, for broadcast at 10:06 a.m. on October 22. The transcript was made available by the Office of the Press Secretary on October 21 but was embargoed for release until the broadcast. The Office of the Press Secretary also released a Spanish language transcript of this address.

Remarks Following a Cabinet Meeting and an Exchange With Reporters *October 24, 2005*

The President. Thank the members of my Cabinet for being here. We’ve just had a discussion about a variety of subjects. These men and women are showing extraordinary leadership to the American people, and I want to thank you for your continued service.

Secretary Chertoff briefed me and briefed the Cabinet about Hurricane Wilma. I also discussed Wilma with FEMA Director Paulison as well as the Governor of Florida, the State of Florida, Jeb Bush.

I signed a major disaster declaration today. We have prepositioned food, medicine, communications equipment, urban search and rescue teams. We will work

closely with local and State authorities to respond to this hurricane.

I urge local citizens to listen to the local authorities about returning back to your homes. Those folks are on the ground. They know what they’re talking about, and it’s important that you pay attention to the messages coming out of people there to help you in Florida. We all ask for God’s blessings on those who are in harm’s way.

Secondly, we discussed responses to Katrina and Rita. We have a duty in the Federal Government to work with State and local authorities to help the citizens in Mississippi and Louisiana and Alabama and Texas. There’s more help to be done, and we need to do so in a fiscally sound